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"History is bunk," Henry Ford is reported to have said. After cogitating about the matter for a few decades, Toynbee answered this by saying: "Henry Ford is history, therefore Henry Ford is bunk."

This points to the fact that there are difficulties and disagreements about the word "history." Look at a few other illustrations of this fact. While many people have said that "history is dead," others, at least since the Romans, have said that "he who knows no history is but a child." Some prefer to categorize history as a social science while others insist that it is one of the humanities. Some think that "history repeats itself" while the uniqueness of each human being, and of each moment, is stressed by other commentators. Petrarch said he read history to get away from the horrors of his own time; no doubt to many persons since his time "history" has been a form of escape, like opium or TV.

Presumably, history was useless to Henry Ford, while other men believe it will support a thesis of progress. Politicians explain history to us in such a way as to make us think of them as the next logical successors to the great founders of our country. Many people, when they meet a history professor, feel compelled to give him sympathy and assurance by avowing their great love of history or to apologize for their hatred of the subject.

The confusion about the word history is not confined to the man in the street. Gregory of Tours saw God's hand frequently in the affairs of men; Bury said simply, history is science; Marx said it all hinged on economics; Collingwood, in his *Idea of History*, said that "All history is the history of thought." [1]

Perhaps nothing stresses the difficulty we have with the word "history" more than to see within the work of one

[1] Oxford University Press, (New York: 1956) p. 317.

specialist, divergencies of usage. Collingwood, for instance, tells us that the object of history is the discovery of human actions [2] and "concrete individual facts," [3] but he also tells us that it is only the thought behind the act, or the inside of the event, that can be called "history." History, he has said, "at bottom . . . . is concerned with thoughts alone." [4] Yet, Collingwood is not alone; all men in old age think differently about the word history than they did in youth. Our vision of the past is often subject to fluctuations caused by changing circumstances.

Let us begin by recognizing that the word history is used to cover at least three general notions: the actuality of the past or the so-called events of the past; the evidence or testimony that gives credence to the events; and thirdly, the evaluation or interpretation of those past actions.

The event, the evidence, and the evaluation. It sounds simple enough, but of course it isn't. What are some of the problems? Some facts, or more properly generalizations of facts, we can agree upon. We can agree that Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, but this involves a multitude of facts on which there seems much lack of agreement. Over 100 volumes and articles are devoted to exploring the event, the evidence, and the evaluation of that one day in our history. When you say there is agreement on the fact that there was an automobile accident on a certain day and in a certain place, you may be right, but in court you find out that the word "accident" is a generalization covering a multitude of facts upon which there is anything but agreement. You find that it is difficult to determine what the facts really are—maybe the facts "would speak for themselves" if you could only ascertain them.

Another difficulty about the "simple" facts of history is the problem of selection. What categories of "facts" should properly be included as part of the tapestry of history? Collingwood would exclude facts about nature, and even biography which chronicles man's natural life.[5] But, how could one

[2] *Ibid.*, pp 9.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 191.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 217.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

exclude Vesuvius, the Titanic, or the San Francisco earthquake, from history, since they influenced the lives of many men? The discovery of diamonds in South Africa in 1869 influenced much British colonial policy; the conquest of malaria, or rather its control, helped build the Panama Canal, enhance the strength of the United States and gave Panamanians something to complain of, besides mosquitoes.

Generally speaking, most historians certainly agree that man is the focus of history; but man lives in nature and the discovery of a river or the noxious weed is a part of his story. Even the inanimate plays its roles—pavements have an effect on man that is different from that of the path in the forest.

So much for some of the problems surrounding the "simple" matter of the actuality of history. What about the evidence? It is of many kinds. Some is passed down by word of mouth; some is recorded on paper; some of it is inferred from artifacts, buildings, clothing and paintings. For many periods in history we have all too little. For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we have such mountains of it we hardly know what to do. Lord Acton, the great 19th Century British historian, once said that the history of the nineteenth century would never be written, because there was so much material, no man could ever master it in a lifetime.

In addition, as in the courtroom where some testimony conflicts, so in history all the evidence does not point to the same conclusion. Some of the evidence is even misleading since men are often cagey about their real motives. A politician, for instance, may in letters and speeches seemingly be motivated by purely patriotic ideals, and yet in actuality be stirred by a desire to serve special interests for the purpose of getting re-elected. Again, public documents are more exercises in public relations than descriptions of actual situations. It is hard to know, for instance, precisely what was intended, if one reads only Wilson's statement on intervention in Russia, as of August 3, 1918. This read, in part: " . . . military intervention in Russia would be more likely to add to the present sad confusion there than to cure it, and would injure Russia rather than help her out of her distress . . . military action is admirable in Russia now only to render such protec-

tion and help as is possible . . . to study any efforts at self-government or self-defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assistance . . . the United States wishes to announce . . . it contemplates no interference with the political sovereignty of Russia . . . not even in the local affairs of the limited areas which her military force may be obliged to occupy . . ." [6] There is no doubt that evidence and testimony has to be carefully sifted, studied in context— it cannot always be taken at face value.

Our third meaning of history, namely evaluation, would include not only the meaning or purpose that the actors in the event had in mind, but the meaning or purpose that subsequent students of the events *thought* the principals had in mind, as well as the ultimate significance of the events in the minds of historians at the time they studied them. The historian tries to relive the action, but brings to that process his own personality and his own times, so we might well question to what extent he is reliving the thought of the men who acted in a remote event.

Evaluation is the most significant of the three meanings of the word "history," though it is obvious that there would be no reliving of an event without that event first having taken place and there being some evidence for it. To relive the past, by grasping a real feeling for the thought of the actors in past events, is certainly ideal,[7] but an ideal not often reached. It takes much patience, effort, and time to arrive at an evaluation and arrive at the point where we feel we are able to relive the experience along with the person acting in the situation. We must first collect as many facts as we possible can. Here is where the novice and amature leave us to dash into the nearest grave generalization, protesting that they do not want just "facts." It can then only be pointed out that hastily formulated generalizations, which will not stand the test of added facts, may be emotionally gratifying for a time, but ultimately are not only without value but

[6] Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Affairs of the United States 1918 Russia,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), Vol. II, pp 328-29.

[7] "History is nothing but the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's mind." Oxford University Press, (New York: 1956) p. 228.

may be possibly harmful. A hasty anaylsis of the courses of ones bankruptcy . . . mainly, that the economic system we live under is hopeless . . . will hardly be likely to produce efforts to create new business.

With three general meanings of the word history in mind, and with some idea of their complexity, we next proceed to the question of what history covers in another fashion. Many years ago a professor tried to convince me of the importance of the formation of sand dunes in the Low Countries before the days of Julius Caesar. This happened to coincide with a period in my life when I was becoming interested not only in social problems, but in personal relations. I was not impressed. Another professor meanwhile was lecturing on the significance of Chinese politics about 2000 BC. Again, I was not impressed and began to think of some better way to explain man's interest in history. Instead of the most remote history, in time and space, we might start with the most immediate environment.

We are all of necessity, historians, first and foremost, ot ourselves. This may be considered history on the first level. Events are to be found in our lives from the beginning – we are smiled upon and frowned at. The evidence is remembered by us as infants and we soon learn to evaluate it—to know how far we can go, or how loudly we must scream to get needed attention. We would be at a very distinct disadvantage if we did not learn to evaluate our experience and to remember the results of such evaluation. This may be all on a subconscious level, but the essential ingredients are there: human acts or events, evidence and evaluation. As a matter of fact we begin almost at the very beginning of life to also study the history of our parents and family or whoever happens to be caring for us. We study their reactions to our acts and condition our behaviour somewhat in relation to their reactions. As we grow older and are ready to start school we widen our circle of observation to the neighborhood and add this third level of the study of history to the first, namely ourselves, and the second of family and friends. As we hear admonitions about our own behavior

we may be stimulated to become a bit more self-conscious; as we hear comment and criticism by our elders of other persons, we may again, be stimulated to reflect more on the significance of the actions of other persons.

Before widening our circle beyond these three levels, it is well to point out the most important history of all is the history of ourselves. If you knew no history of yourself, your decisions would be less than infantile. You, as an individual, feel that you are at least a little wiser today than you were ten years ago because you have had some experiences and you have remembered them sufficiently to reflect upon them. You think of the results of this reflection as wisdom. Since your own successful passage through life is the matter of greatest concern to you, reflection upon your experience is of the greatest importance to you. Plato moves us to history when he counsels "know thyself;" religious leaders urge us on when they tell us to examine our consciences; the prospective employer thinks our history is important in proportion to the size of the trust he contemplates reposing in us; even Uncle Sam wants us to tell him of some of our financial history at least once a year.

All this may seem tediously obvious. What is less obvious is that habits of reflection upon our own experience are directly valuable to the understanding of the history of other levels. "Man . . . desires to know himself," [8] says Collingwood, and "all he can know historically is thought that he can re-think for himself." [9] The historian cannot get behind the thought of the actor in history unless he himself has done some considerable thinking about similar problems. In other words, the introspective person will be better able to understand his fellow men. The more conscience thought we have given to life's problems as we encounter them, the more insight we will have into the problems of other people, and the more we study the lives of other people, the more insights we get that can be helpful to ourselves.

We are all aware of the difficulty of studying our own

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 205.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

history with any degree of objectivity and so while we wait for the emotional impact of some actions to become minimized by Father Time, we can profitably turn to more self-conscious efforts to study the history of family and friends. After all, here we have our first source material, outside of ourselves, for the study of human actions. Though we can be more objective here, there are still, of course, emotional blocks because of our relationships. But greater understanding of ourselves can also result, because what we are is in great part determined by our antecedents. We must run the risk of turning up a pirate uncle in the family closet—he may have been the only one with exceptional imagination.

The third, or local level, of study of history is also something that we all undertake to some extent, because we must in order to find our way about and to fit into the community. We could all profitably do a better job of it. In the same way that understanding of our family is based on reflection of countless numbers of past actions and situations, reflection upon the local or community scene gives us greater understanding of that scene, and also of the relationship of our family and ourselves to it. Again, as understanding of the family throws light on our personal character and development, so also does a deeper appreciation of the community of which we are a part aid us in understanding both the family and ourselves. For instance the attitudes of many people to racial questions, depends considerably on whether they were raised in a southern or in a northern community, as well as on the attitudes prevelant among their immediate family and friends. Turner's thesis stressing the renewal of democratic ideas on the frontier also supports the idea of the importance of one's local environment. When people come great distances to examine local or state archives, we are reminded of their value and that there's work to be done at home.

Moving to the fourth level of history—that of the nation—we see that very similar arguments are relevant. Much of this history seems more remote in time and space. This fact, combined with much inadequate presentation of history in

grade and high schools, and sometimes in colleges, helps to explain why many people fail to see the importance of history on this level. Logically, of course, it is easy to see that in a democracy, where all men to varying degrees should participate in making decisions for the future, that all men should, according to their different capacities, try to study the past. The value of decisions for the future depends in great part on the understanding of what has already happened.

It is not enough to see in the study of the nation's history a duty, or logical necessity flowing from a concept of democracy; it is also important to see how history on this level can be useful and practicable to history on the levels of self, family, and community. To see this we must have more than a recital of the so-called "facts" of history; we must have more than a catalogue of battles, dates and inaugurations. We must go into sufficient detail to, at least in part, relive the thoughts and feelings of men in the past. We must be able to vicariously experience the strain of the moral, intellectual and physical problems they faced, as if they were happening to a friend or neighbor. Only then are the "facts" of history being clothed with flesh and blood and only then does history become meaningful and valuable to us. As a matter of fact, it can be put more strongly: only then do we know what the word "history" means; only then we can begin to see how history on this level is related to history on the first three levels. It is a two-way street. The more reflective we have been about life as it strikes us on the personal, familiar and local levels, the more we will be able to relive the lives of men involved in history on the larger canvas. Conversely, the more we study the lives of the great, and reflect upon them, the more we may be able to appreciate the nuances of human experience on the more intimate levels of experience. The more we study the lives of the common people, and contemplate the sufferings and privations of the people who built this country, the more we experience a feeling of gratitude and a sense of shame at deciding to ride to the store, one block away. It is not enough to have just looked at a covered wagon in a museum—one must reflect, from time to time, on the lives of the people who used them.

Of course we cannot stop at the nation. As we study history on what we may call a fifth level, that of Western Civilization, and on a sixth level, that of the world, we cannot fail eventually to see that a better understanding of history on these levels will enable us to see the history of our own nation in better perspective. We would rather trust foreign-policy decisions, other things being equal, to a representative in Congress who had some years of study in the area of Russian History than to one who had spent his years in the study of the anatomy of worms, as did Lenin's older brother. However one may emphasize the unique and independent character of America, the fact yet remains that its origins lie in Europe, more immediately, and beyond that, in the Near East. Avery Craven of the University of Chicago used to emphasize that our colonial history was the history of Europeans living in the wilderness. Who could deny that the founding fathers were influenced in their thinking by the Glorious Revolution in England or by the political thought of Montesquieu? Who could question that a better understanding of Calvin would help one to see better, the relationship of his Presbyterian Church today to the totality of the Judeo-Christian tradition?

A further example of how our European heritage has influenced us can be seen in the anti-Russian and anti-Slavic bias we have inherited from German and English thinkers and publicists. This bias no doubt had some influence on President Harper of the University of Chicago when he decided to cut out Russian studies in 1909, saying that the Russians were a nuisance and would never amount to anything. All this did not help us to a better understanding of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the challenge that it presented. During the 1920's we hoped that by not recognizing the bomb-throwing, bearded anarchists, they would go away. They weren't and they didn't. Our attitude in the 1920's can only be understood in the light of the previous century, both in Europe and America.

As the roots of American policy may be influenced by a study of the past in terms of the level of Western Civilization and the world, we should also emphasize the importance of

the influence of a study of history on these larger levels for the appreciation of history on the smaller scale. To the unreflective mind, Gandhi can only be an anachronism in the 20th century; to the patient student of Gandhi may come a deeper understanding of the meaning of life, which spotlight he can turn upon his own history. It is an old story, but with a good sharp point: the boy at 16 thought his father rather behind the times but at 21 the same boy wondered how his father had learned so much in the last five years. Applied to history, the 16 year old would not perhaps get much out of a study of St. Augustine of Hippo; but at 21, if he had reflected upon his experience and the temptations of life, he might get a great deal out of a study of St. Augustine, though perhaps not as much as he would get at age 51. In other words, our ability to relive the lives of the men of the past to a very great extent depends upon our own experience and the degree to which we have reflected on the meaning of that experience. Going the other way on our two-way street, we can well imagine that a detailed study of Bismarck's administration is bound to give us a keener appreciation of the subtleties of political life and possibly a bit of insight into human nature as well.

We use the word "history" to mean the actuality of the past, the evidence that attests to it, and its evaluation or interpretation. There is no doubt that the evaluation is the most important—it influences us in our present actions which plan the future. The decision of a man to try business again, after having gone through bankruptcy, is influenced by his evaluation of the causes of his previous failure. Our decisions for the future are influenced by feeling, intuition, circumstances, and to some extent by this self-conscious intellectual process which has evaluated past experience.

History, is thus the influence of the past upon the present, in the life of man. This may come about, however, not only through a self-conscious intellectual process, but also through heredity and environment. We inherit much from our ancestors that influences us in our approach to life. We may be

influenced by being awe-struck by a great cathederal, a Roman aqueduct, or the Golden Gate bridge.

As long as man continues to try to understand life, he will continue to consciously study history; yet all men are influenced by the past, whether they will it or not. In periods of apparent or real change, this tendency to a more self-conscious study of the past exhibits itself the most, in both the individual and the world as a whole. Periods of extreme crisis are specially productive of self-examination. Unfortunately, periods of success do not so stimulate us, and periods of uncritical acceptance usually pave the way for crisis. We should often remind ouselves, "It is later than you think."

From the Annals 100 Years Ago

ANNALS OF IOWA, JANUARY 1, 1864

The Seasons of 1863

The seasons in Iowa, for the past year of 1863, have been most remarkable and surprising to the "oldest inhabitants." Showers fell in January, February and March, accompanied with thunder and lightning. Frost, in some parts of the State, was observed every month in the warm season. And, from drouth continued in some places, through June and July, or from frosts in August and September, all vegetation of corn and potatoe crops was stopped; and the buckwheat crop was entirely cut off, a thing unknown before.